

CONGRESSMAN SHERWOOD BOEHLERT (R-NY)
OPENING STATEMENT FOR BORDER SECURITY HEARING
September 13, 2006

I want to welcome everyone this afternoon's hearing. I especially want to welcome Admiral Cohen, who was confirmed as Under Secretary right before the August recess and who is making his first appearance before our Committee. We have very high hopes for Admiral Cohen, and we appreciate his efforts to make sure he could attend today's hearing.

I want to remind Admiral Cohen, as we always reminded his predecessor, that this is the Committee that created the Science and Technology Directorate, and we are eager to see it succeed. As we said at the time we were establishing the Department of Homeland Security, "Like the cold war, the war against terrorism will be won as much in the laboratory as on the battlefield." We cannot afford to let the Directorate flounder.

One of the Directorate's most important areas of responsibility is the subject of today's hearing, border security. There are many aspects of border security – a hot topic right now – but one essential aspect is certainly how to successfully deploy technology to help prevent or thwart illegal border crossings.

My sense is that we haven't done a very good job of that so far. We haven't methodically thought through what technology to deploy, how to deploy it, and how to integrate it with the people who will actually be apprehending those trying to cross the border illegally. We haven't come up with a clear, adequately funded plan to conduct the research needed to improve existing technologies and create new ones. And in Congress, we haven't thought comprehensively about border security, instead focusing on massive public works projects, like border fences.

Hopefully, the Secure Border Initiative the Department of Homeland Security is in the process of implementing will start us down a more thoughtful and successful path. This Committee will certainly be watching that with great anticipation. And we will especially want to be sure that there is adequate research to ensure that technology can continue to improve.

We have before us today some of the leading experts in the field, who will give us their views on what the Department, and particularly the Science and Technology Directorate, should be doing to ensure that border security improves. Our motto here should be “better living through technology.” That doesn’t mean technology to the exclusion of people. It means technology that is designed with the users in mind and that is integrated with the border patrol.

I am very eager to hear their testimony.

Mr. Gordon.